

University of Technology Sydney

# **Preserving Lumbar Spine Health for the Australian Cleaning Industry**

By

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## ***0.1 Certificate of Original Authorship***

I, Denis Boulais declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Science at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all the information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

Production Note:  
Signature removed prior to publication.

Denis Patrick Boulais

Date: 25.08.20

## ***0.2 Acknowledgements***

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship and I would like to thank the Australian Government for this research opportunity. I would also like to thank Broadlex Services for their support and permission to use Company resources to complete this study.

I would like to thank my PhD supervisor, Dr Tamara Sztynka and co-supervisors' Associate Professors Christopher Zaslowski and Sara Lal, for their advice and assistance over the duration of this study. I would also like to thank UTS Professor James Brown (ABS Professor of Official Statistics) for his advice on statistics used throughout this study. I would also like to thank my parents, wife and three daughters for their patience and support throughout the duration of this study.

In 2017, I was the joint winner of the University of Technology Dr Loraine Holley essay prize. The left photo below illustrates Dr Tamara Sztynka (left), myself (middle) and Dr Loraine Holley (right).

My family is pictured in the right photo (Christmas 2018). From left to right, Samantha, Alyssa, Jessica and Michelle Boulais.



I would like to thank the following conference organisers for allowing me the opportunity to present my findings at their events over the period of my PhD candidature.

- Clean New Zealand Conference (Auckland) (May 2016) (Interpoint Events).
- ISSA Cleaning and Hygiene Expo (Melbourne) (May 2017) (ISSA).
- Australian Safety Systems Conference (Sydney) (May 2017) (ACS).
- Safety Connect (Sydney) (August 2018) (NSCA).
- Building Services Contractors Association of Australia (March 2019) (BSCAA).

Picture Top Left (My presentation at the ISSA Cleaning and Hygiene Expo).

Picture Top Right (My presentation at Clean NZ).

Picture Bottom (My presentation at BSCAA).



Because my study is a strong hybrid of academia and industry, it was important that I publish my findings in academic and industry publications. This approach ensures my findings shall reach many thousands of readers in the cleaning industry throughout Australasia.

Firstly, I would like to thank the peer reviewed Journal of Health, Safety and Environment for publishing this study's findings as per:

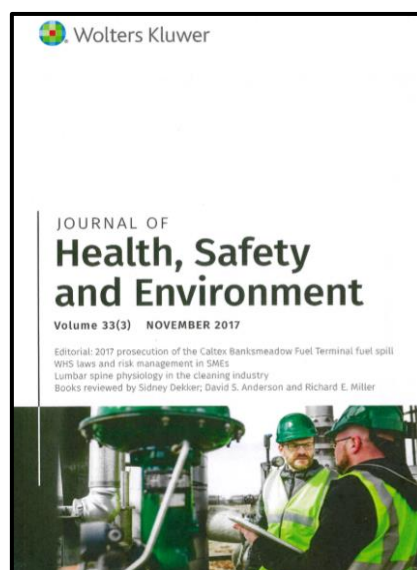
Boulais. D, S. Lal, Szynda. T and C. Zaslowski. 2017. Preserving lumbar spine physiology in the cleaning industry. *Journal of Health, Safety and Environment*. 33:347-346.

As Australasia's peak publication in this area then I am proud to be associated with this Journal.

Secondly, I would also like to thank Inclean Magazine which is Australia's peak cleaning industry publication. Over the period of my PhD candidature I have had a regular two monthly safety section in this industry publication and the findings of this study were published in their 30<sup>th</sup> year anniversary edition.

Picture Left (The Journal of Health, Safety and Environment)

Picture Right (Inclean Magazine 30 year edition)



### **0.3 Abstract**

Lumbar spine disc breakdown may begin as early as the second decade of life. Peak bone mass occurs between the ages of 16 and 25 years and continuously decreases thereafter increasing risk of injury as we age. The main objective of this study was to identify, assess and control hazards in the cleaning industry with a view to reducing risk and improving the recovery of injured workers.

The records of 144 musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) related incidents that were recorded between 2012 and 2016 (five years) were retrieved from the injury register of a large commercial cleaning organisation (n=700) for analysis. Furthermore, cleaners (n=220) and their managers (n=30) underwent a random voluntary survey to ascertain their knowledge of manual handling.

It was identified that summer had the higher frequency of MSDs, 44 of 144 (30.55%). This highlighted the need for preventative strategies such as training and activity around fatigue management and maintenance of hydration.

It was also found that 76 of 144 (52.77%) of MSD injuries occurred within the first two hours of a cleaner's shift. Hence it is recommended that the cleaning industry implement pre-start warm-up strategies to reduce MSD.

A significant relationship was identified between the age of cleaners (younger or older than 45 years) and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) (lumbar or non-lumbar MSD)  $\chi^2$  (df=1, N=144) = 4.8997,  $p < 0.05$ . This finding suggests training in lower back protection should be prioritised.

Incident investigations showed that training was the most common level of risk control measure implemented on 124 (86.11%) of occasions. This suggests that training is well grounded within the organisation and in future should have a competency based focus. It was recommended that training focus on risk controls and take a participatory/consultative approach.

Surveys of staff identified that cleaners and managers require focused training in the areas of safe use of equipment and lifting. This led to the recommendation that training programs must be competency-based, primarily due to the industry's lower level of education and the predominance of non-English speaking background workers.

In summary, the cleaning industry requires a strong focus upon hydration and fatigue programs, pre-start warm-up programs, and competency-based training. This training should have a focus upon hazard identification, safe use of equipment, safe lifting, risk control and workers participation/consultation.

Addressing these objectives will have a strong positive impact upon achieving the main research objective of identifying, assessing and controlling hazards in the cleaning industry.

## **0.4 Table of Contents**

0.1	Certificate of Original Authorship	ii
0.2	Acknowledgements	iii
0.3	Abstract	vi
0.4	Table of Contents	viii
0.5	List of Tables	x
0.6	List of Figures and Case Studies	xiii
0.7	List of Abbreviations	xiv
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	The Cleaning Industry and Safety	1
1.2	Research Aims	8
1.3	Hypotheses	11
1.4	Narrative versus Systematic Style	14
2.	MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS	15
2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	MSDs in the Cleaning Industry	26
2.3	General Anatomy and Physiology	40
2.4	Lumbar Spine	42
2.5	Lower Back Pain Epidemiology	47
2.6	The Aging Population and Spinal Issues	50
3.	RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE	59
3.1	Introduction	59
3.2	Work Health and Safety Management	60
3.3	Safety Management System Standard	65
3.4	Approaches to Work Health and Safety	66
3.5	Risk Management	68
3.6	Achieving Effective Work Health and Safety	74
4.	CLEANING TASKS AND THEIR HAZARDS	82
4.1	Introduction	82
4.2	Dusting	86
4.3	Sweeping	87
4.4	Glass Cleaning	88
4.5	Mopping	89
4.6	Outside Blowing	90
4.7	Vacuuming	91
4.8	Emptying Bins	92
4.9	Toilet Cleaning	93
4.10	Manual Handling	95
4.11	Ergonomics	115
4.12	Slips, Trips and Falls	120



5. METHODOLOGY	125
5.1 Research Objectives	125
5.2 Injury Notification Database Audit	128
5.3 Survey Based Research Objectives	132
6. RESULTS (INJURY DATABASE)	139
6.1 Introduction	139
6.2 Season of MSD Occurrence	142
6.3 Time in Shift of MSD Occurrence	146
6.4 Injured Body Part Due to MSD	149
6.5 Risk Control Strategy Post Injury	152
6.6 Conclusions	153
7. RESULTS (MANUAL HANDLING SURVEY)	155
7.1 Introduction	155
7.2 Results	159
7.3 Conclusions	194
8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	195
8.1 Injury Database	195
8.2 Manual Handling Survey	213
8.3 Study Limitations	273
8.4 Conclusions	275
8.5 Future Research Opportunities	281
8.6 Recommendations	283
REFERENCES	284
APPENDICES	380
Appendix 1 The Survey	380
Appendix 2 Survey Participant Information Sheet	389
Appendix 3 Additional Injury Data Collected	390
Appendix 4 TAE 40116 Transcript	401
Appendix 5 Rapid Entire Body Assessment	402
Appendix 6 Rapid Upper Limb Assessment	411

## 0.5 *List of Tables*

Number	List of Tables
1.3	Hypothesis Development and Data Collection.
2.1.1	Serious MSD Claims by Nature of Injury or Disease (2009-2014).
2.1.2	Percentage of Serious Claims Involving MSDs (2000-2014).
2.1.3	Lost Time from Work and Compensation Paid for Serious MSD Claims (14 years).
2.1.4	Frequency Rates of Serious MSD Claims by Age Group and Sex (2009-2014).
2.1.5	Serious MSD Claims by Mechanism of MSD and Occupation (2009-2014).
2.1.6	Serious MSD Claims by MSD Location and Nature (09-14).
2.1.7	Serious MSD Claims by Occupation (2009-2014).
2.2.1	Risk Factors Contributing to MSD Development.
2.2.2	Symptoms and Specific Diagnoses Associated with MSDs.
2.2.3	Risk Factors Associated with Repetition.
2.2.4	Psychosocial and Organisational Factors Contributing to MSDs.
2.2.5	Workforce Characteristics Influencing MSDs.
3.3.1	Maximum Penalties Under the Work Health and Safety Act.
4.1.1	Commonly Completed Cleaning Tasks.
4.2.1	Dusting Hazards and Controls.
4.3.1	Sweeping Hazards and Controls.
4.4.1	Glass Cleaning Hazards and Controls.
4.5.1	Mopping Hazards and Controls.
4.6.1	Outside Blowing Hazards and Controls.
4.7.1	Vacuuming Hazards and Controls.
4.8.1	Emptying Bins Hazards and Controls.
4.9.1	Toilet Cleaning Hazards and Controls.
4.10.1	Options for Manual Handling in the Cleaning Industry.
4.10.2	Options for Manual Handling in the Cleaning Industry.
4.10.3	Options for Manual Handling in the Cleaning Industry.
4.10.4	Options for Manual Handling in the Cleaning Industry.
4.10.5	Options for Manual Handling in the Cleaning Industry.
4.10.6	Acceptable Weight of Lift (kg).
4.10.7	Frequencies for Movement of Various Weights.

<b>Number</b>	<b>List of Tables (Continued)</b>
4.10.8	Typical Weights Handled in the Cleaning Industry.
4.12.1	Options for Slips, Trips and Falls in the Cleaning Industry.
6.1.1	Overall Statistical Outcomes (2012-2016).
6.1.2	Age and Gender Interaction – Year by Year (2012-2016).
6.1.3	Age Group (Years) versus Gender (2012-2016).
6.2.1	Age versus Season of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.2.2	Gender versus Season of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.2.3	Age (years) versus Season of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.2.4	Gender versus Season of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.3.1	Age versus Time-in-Shift of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.3.2	Gender versus Time-in-Shift of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.3.3	Age (years) versus Time in Shift of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.3.4	Gender versus Time in Shift of MSD Occurrence (2012-2016).
6.4.1	Age versus Injured Body Part due to MSD (2012-2016).
6.4.2	Gender versus Injured Body Part due to MSD (2012-2016).
6.4.3	Age (Years) versus Injured Body Part due to MSD (2012-2016).
6.4.4	Gender versus Injured Body Part due to MSD (2012-2016).
6.5.1	Risk Control Measures Implemented Post Injury from MSD (2012-2016)
6.5.2	Risk Control Measures Implemented Post Injury from MSD by Year (12-16)
7.1	Cleaner Survey – Overall Outcomes.
7.2	Manual Handling Survey Outcomes (Cleaners and Managers)
7.2.1	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question One.
7.2.2	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Two.
7.2.3	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Three.
7.2.4	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Four.
7.2.5	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Five.
7.2.6	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Six.
7.2.7(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Seven.
7.2.7 (b)	Age (years) versus Correct or Incorrect Response (Question 7) Cleaners.
7.2.8(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Eight.
7.2.8(b)	Manager Survey Outcomes – Question Eight.
7.2.9	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Nine.
7.2.10(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Ten.

<b>Number</b>	<b>List of Tables (Continued)</b>
7.2.10(b)	Manager Survey Outcomes – Question Ten.
7.2.10 (c)	Age (Years) versus Correct or Incorrect Response (Question 10) Cleaners
7.2.10 (d)	Age (Years) versus Correct or Incorrect Response (Question 10) Managers
7.2.11	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Eleven.
7.2.12	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twelve.
7.2.13	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Thirteen.
7.2.14	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Fourteen.
7.2.15(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Fifteen.
7.2.15(b)	Manager Survey Outcomes – Question Fifteen.
7.2.16	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Sixteen.
7.2.17(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Seventeen.
7.2.17(b)	Manager Survey Outcomes – Question Seventeen.
7.2.18	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Eighteen.
7.2.19	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Nineteen.
7.2.20(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty.
7.2.20(b)	Age (years) versus Correct or Incorrect Response (Question 20) Cleaners
7.2.21(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty One.
7.2.21(b)	Manager Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty One.
7.2.22	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty Two.
7.2.23(a)	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty Three.
7.2.23(b)	Manager Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty Three.
7.2.23 (c)	Age (years) versus Correct or Incorrect Response (Question 23) Cleaners
7.2.23 (d)	Age (years) versus Correct or Incorrect Response (Question 23) Managers
7.2.24	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty Four.
7.2.25	Cleaner Survey Outcomes – Question Twenty Five.
8.2.26	Age (years) versus Survey Outcome.
8.2.27	Gender versus Survey Outcome.
8.2.26	Certificate III in Cleaning Operations
8.4	Study Conclusions in Summary

## ***0.6 List of Figures and Case Studies***

<b>Number</b>	<b>List of Figures</b>
2.4.1	Spine Anatomy
2.4.2	Disc Herniation
2.6.1	Lumbar Spine Degeneration
2.6.2	Lumbar Facet Syndrome
2.6.3	Lumbar Osteoporosis
3.1.1	The Energy Damage Model
3.1.2	Generalised Time Sequence Model
3.5.1	Risk Control Hierarchy
3.5.2	A Backpack Vacuum
3.5.3	A Food Area Mop and Bucket
3.5.4	Swiss Cheese Model of Risk
5.2.1	The Study Organisations Safety Hotline

<b>Number</b>	<b>List of Case Studies</b>
3.5.1	Cleaning Chemical Risk Control
3.5.2	Simple Actions – Big Outcomes (Vacuum Bags)
3.5.3	Simple Actions – Big Outcomes (Colour Coding)
3.5.4	Tasty Safety
4.10.1	Manual Handling Case Study (Uncoordinated Team Lifting)

## ***0.7 List of Abbreviations***

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Name</b>
AS	Australian Standard
BSCAA	Building Services Contracting Association of Australia
CAF	Cleaning Accountability Framework
ECG	Electrocardiogram
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points
ISO	International Standards Organisation
LART	Lift Assisted Rubbish Trolley
LTI	Lost Time Injury
LTID	Lost Time Injury Duration
LTIFR	Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate
MSD	Musculoskeletal Disorder
MTI	Medically Treated Injury
N&C	Nature and Conditions
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NSCA	National Safety Council of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
NZS	New Zealand Standard
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
OOS	Occupational Overuse Syndrome
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RCD	Residual Current Device
REBA	Rapid Entire Body Assessment
RSI	Repetitive Strain Injury
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
RULA	Rapid Upper Limb Assessment
SDS	Safety Data Sheet
STI	Soft Tissue Injury
WHS	Work Health and Safety